

# ACT NO. 7158

BILL NO. 28-0159

## TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

### Regular Session

2010

An Act commemorating laborers on Fireburn Day as a day to be revered and remembered in the Virgin Islands

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**WHEREAS**, after the emancipation of enslaved Africans within the Virgin Islands, work continued on the plantations; and

**WHEREAS**, competition from European sugar-beet growers and other sugar producing countries had a negative impact on the Virgin Islands' plantation-based economy during the nineteenth century; and

**WHEREAS**, after the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the slaves, plantation growers employed contract immigrant laborers and former slaves. To reduce operating expenses and gain the competitive edge, employers began to exploit their workers; and

**WHEREAS**, on January 26, 1849, the Danish Government issued a Labor Act that restricted the bargaining power and mobility of plantation laborers by fixing their wages and requiring that on October 1<sup>st</sup> they sign a contract to work on a particular plantation for an entire year; and

**WHEREAS**, poor living conditions, low wages prevailed; and

**WHEREAS**, October 1st of each year ended a plantation laborer's contract, and this gave the laborer the ability to contract on a neighboring plantation for the following year; and

**WHEREAS**, on July 3, 1848, and every year after, employers promised increased wages and better living and working conditions; and

**WHEREAS**, every year, the employers failed on all promises; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1878, after all peaceable attempts to demand a better quality of life failed, women on St. Croix, known as Queens, Queen Mary Thomas, Queen Mathilde Macbean, Queen Susanna "Bottom Belly" Abrahamson and Axeline "Queen Agnes" Salomon, Rebecca Fredericks and others, together with men, including Joe Paris, James de Silva, Joseph LaGrange, John Lewis,

to repeal the Labor Act of 1849, demand comparable wages to those of St. Croix Central Factory workers, and obtain better working and living conditions; and

**WHEREAS**, when their demands were not met, and lacking alternative means of redressing their long-standing grievances, they burned down towns and sugar cane plantations. By the end of the "Fireburn", which lasted one week, eight hundred seventy-nine acres from Estate Prosperity to Peters Rest on St. Croix were burned, including forty-three or more sugar plantations; and

**WHEREAS**, the 1878 labor revolt contributed to the achievement of fair labor standards, wage increases, a higher standard of living and quality of life for laborers on St. Croix; and

**WHEREAS**, it is befitting to commemorate the struggles and sacrifices of early laborers and labor leaders by designating October 1 as Fireburn Day; Now, Therefore,

***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

**SECTION 1.** On October 1 of each year, "Fire Burn Day" shall be held in all public schools in the Virgin Islands. Appropriate ceremonies shall be held in all public schools in the Virgin Islands to reflect upon this most important day in the history of the Virgin Islands. The Commissioner of Education shall be responsible for the reproduction and dissemination of information about Fire Burn Day to all public, private and parochial schools.

Thus passed by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on March 8, 2010.

Witnessed our Hands and Seal of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands this 23  
Day of March, A.D., 2010.



  
Louis Patrick Hill  
President

  
Samuel Sanes  
Legislative Secretary

**Bill No. 28-0159 is hereby approved.**

**Witness my hand and the Seal of the  
Government of the United States  
Virgin Islands at Charlotte Amalie,  
St. Thomas, this 7th day of April,  
A.D., 2010.**



  
John P. de Jongh, Jr.  
Governor